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9. OCCURRENCE OF *SALEA ANAMALLAYANA* BEDDOME, 1878 IN HIGH WAVY MOUNTAINS, WESTERN GHATS, INDIA

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Two species of spiny lizards, *Salea horsfieldii* and *Salea anamallayana*, have been reported from the Western Ghats of south-western India. Unequal and strongly imbricate dorsal scales and compressed body distinguish these lizards from other agamids of the Western Ghats. The Anamalai Spiny Lizard, *S. anamallayana* could be distinguished from Nilgiri Spiny Lizard, *S. horsfieldii* based on the presence of a fold on the shoulder, and continuous nuchal and dorsal crest in

males (Smith 1935). While *S. horsfieldii* is reported both from north and south of the Palghat gap, *S. anamallayana* is restricted to south of Palghat (Smith 1935). However, Bhupathy and Kannan (1997) suggested the need for further investigations to confirm the occurrence of *S. horsfieldii* south of Palghat.

The Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Coimbatore is conducting ecological investigations on the herpetofauna of High Wavy Mountains, Theni Forest Division, Western Ghats since April 2006, and the following agamid lizards have been recorded; *Sitana ponticeriana*, *Calotes versicolor*, *C. calotes*, *C. grandisquamis*, *C. ronxii*, *C. ellioti* and *Psammophilus* sp. till December 2007. On April 20, 2007, while sampling in the Plateau of High Wavy Mountains, we came across an agamid lizard and it has been identified as a male *Salea anamallayana* based on the presence of unequal dorsal scales, fold on shoulder and continuous nuchal and dorsal crests. Snout-vent length and tail length of the lizard measured 40.2 mm and 60.3 mm respectively. Precise locality of this record is upper Manalar (9° 36' N; 77° 21' E), High Wavy Mountains, Western Ghats in Theni Forest Division, Tamil Nadu. This area (1,700 m above mean sea level) has remnants of evergreen forests, and is located on the border of Tamil Nadu and Kerala states. The boundary of Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala was in close vicinity (about 500 m) from the observation site of this agamid lizard.

It reported that *S. anamallayana* is restricted to the higher altitudes of the southern Western Ghats, especially in Anamalai, Palni (*Palani*) and Travancore Hills (Smith 1935). However, precise locality records for this species are scanty, which include Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, Eravikulam National Park (Anamalai Hills), Mathikettan Shola and Mariyanshola in Palni Hills (Smith 1935; Bhupathy and

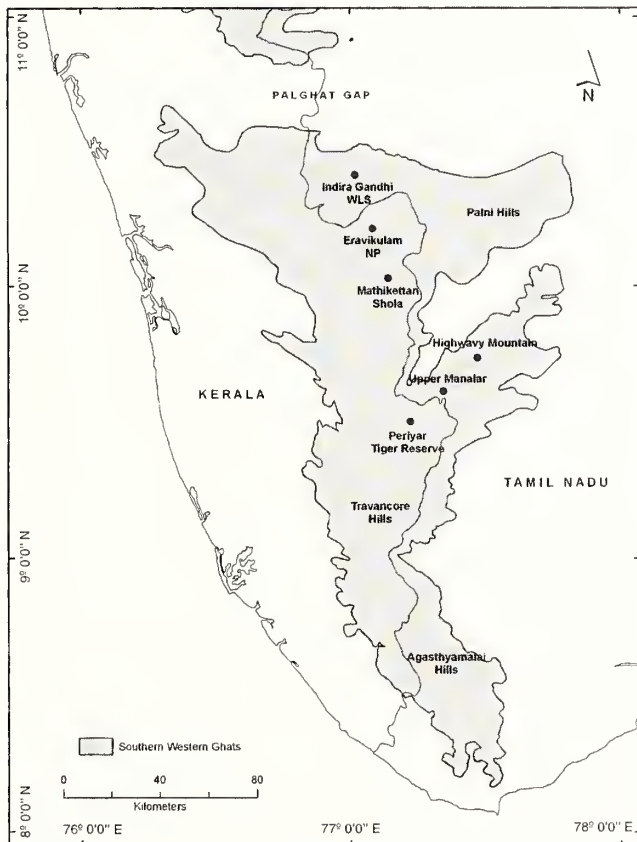


Fig. 1: Map of Southern Western Ghats, south-western India showing the locality records of *Salea anamallayana*

Kannan 1997; Bhupathy and Nixon 2004, Fig. 1). Even though, the present locality lies within the general Travancore Hills, it is perhaps, the only precise locality record available for this species south of Anamalai and Palni Hills, and is about 50 km (in straight line) from the nearest known site (i.e. Mathikettan shola). This record also indicates the possibility of the occurrence of *S. anamallayana* in Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala and on other hill tops such as Agasthiayamalai located further south. Further intensive surveys may yield new locality records and insights on the distribution pattern of this rare and endemic agamid species.

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10. RECORDS OF *ERYX JOHNNI* (RUSSELL, 1801) (OPHIDIA: BOIDAE) AND *ECHIS CARINATUS* (SCHNEIDER, 1801) (OPHIDIA: VIPERIDAE) FROM THE THAR DESERT, RAJASTHAN, INDIA, WITH DISTRIBUTIONAL NOTES ON OTHER SNAKES

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During the course of a routine survey of the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, as a part of the assessment of impacts of the Indira Gandhi Nahar Project on biodiversity, two snakes, *Eryx johnii* and *Echis carinatus*, were encountered. Indian Sand Boa *Eryx johnii* was observed at 2245 hrs on August 15, 2000, in an agricultural field near the Desert National Park (DNP) guest house at Sudansari, Jaisalmer. The venomous Saw-scaled Viper *Echis carinatus* was observed at 2150 hrs on August 17, 2000, in a hard rocky area with sparse vegetation, c. 8 km towards Barmer on the road from Jaisalmer. The subspecies status of this reptile was not determined, i.e., whether the snake was *Echis carinatus carinatus* or *Echis carinatus sochureki* (some taxonomists consider the two to be distinct species – *Echis carinatus* and *Echis sochureki*).

A marked difference in behaviour was observed between the two species. The Indian Sand Boa on being disturbed was not aggressive, instead it tried to escape. The Saw-scaled Viper on the other hand, adopted a defensive posture.

Both the snake species have been reported to occur throughout the dry arid regions of India. The Thar Desert covers 13 districts of western Rajasthan. So far, a total of 20 snake species have been reported from the Thar Desert

(Sharma 1996; Bhide *et al.* 2004). However, a look at their district-wise distribution reveals that they are not uniformly distributed. Maximum concentration occurs in Jodhpur district (15 species), while not a single species has been reported from Barmer, Churu, Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Jalore and Jhunjhunu districts. In our opinion, as all the 13 districts of western Rajasthan lie within the Thar Desert and have similar environmental conditions, 60-70% of the snake species recorded in the Thar Desert may be present in all the districts. The present status of report may be due to the biased nature of earlier surveys. Thus, there exists plenty of scope in the distributional study of snakes within all 13 districts of the Thar Desert.

Previously, the Indian Sand Boa has been reported from two districts and the Saw-scaled Viper from five districts of western Rajasthan (Table 1). The present report adds to the existing knowledge of distribution of snake fauna in Jaisalmer district of the Thar Desert, Rajasthan, India.

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